

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2016 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Russell Cherry (Vice-Chair), Gary Collins, Roy Jones and Terry Piccolo

**Apologies:** Councillor Michael Stone

**In attendance:** Councillor Pauline Tolson, Cabinet Member for Environment  
Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place  
Sue Harper, Interim Head of Environment  
Charlotte Raper, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **11. Minutes**

The minutes of the Extraordinary Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5 September 2016 were approved as a correct record.

### **12. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **13. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **14. Portfolio Holder's Presentation**

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment and thanked her for her attendance.

The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced her presentation and reminded Members that the current Administration had inherited the impact of cuts made by the previous Administration in February 2015 with 59.3 staff posts deleted and a piece of equipment out of action for 7 months whilst awaiting a repair. Despite this the situation was looking positive, thanks to hard work from staff. During the presentation the Cabinet Member for Environment implored residents to ensure any domestic work was completed by reputable companies with the correct trade waste and carrier licences to reduce the rate of fly-tipping and highlighted the need to review current waste

treatment. There was a need to increase the recycling rate within the borough which would lead to reduced costs.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment for her presentation and insisted that the focus on a cleaner, greener Borough was positive and it was right that resources were dedicated to improving the appearance of the Borough. He highlighted the importance of maintaining momentum and ensuring that the right areas were targeted. The Chair admitted that both the £150,000 pilot and increased barrow beats had been welcome and asked whether the Cabinet Member for Environment personally saw the pilot as a success to be extended. The Cabinet Member for Environment stressed the need to await the outcome of the pilot for a full decision; however Members heard that the initial feedback from residents had been positive. The Chair asked whether the Cabinet Member for Environment personally saw the pilot in a positive light and she agreed that she did.

The Chair extended the figures for the pilot and reached a rough figure of £600,000 for a full year and asked whether that was a pressure officers were starting to identify within the budget process, and asked whether the Cabinet Member for Environment would be pushing for that outcome. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place echoed the Cabinet Member for Environment's comments that it was necessary to await the outcome of the pilot and understand the full year costs. The "Clean it" aspect could be extrapolated however the "cut it" aspect would naturally see seasonal variation and as such figures would need to be obtained for the budget-setting process. The Committee heard that Officers were also looking at the Environment budget as a whole to identify any possibilities for savings which would help to address the pressure. The Cabinet Member for Environment reiterated that the figures would need to be assessed, and added that she had forgotten to mention within her presentation the fact that costs had been increased by the need to hire equipment in place of the machinery that had not been repaired.

The Chair returned to comments about cost savings within the budget and asked whether there were any major themes for cost savings or income generation that had become apparent. The Committee heard that savings were likely to come from back office as opposed to frontline services. There had also been increased enforcement and greater efficiency of trade waste fines which would generate income. It was outlined that there would be an opportunity for the Committee to review savings options for the budget at the next meeting. The Chair queried whether there were a full set of proposals to come to the Committee or whether Officers were still adding to the list. Members heard that Officers were pursuing the transformation agenda throughout the Council and options would be brought to relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the coming months and that the Corporate Director of Environment and Place would go into full detail at that point.

Councillor Jones noted that the overall appearance of the Borough had improved, and asked whether there was any indication of an increased number of mobile enforcement cameras. The Cabinet Member for

Environment informed the Committee that additional cameras had been requested but as yet no decision had been made. There was evidence that many cameras were vandalised and certain sites had no power supply, however she insisted she would ask the question again and the response would be sent to Members. Councillor Jones also asked whether it would be possible to produce a timetable for residents with details of when grassy areas would be cut. The Cabinet Member for Environment reiterated that grass in parks and open spaces was now cut every three weeks and those areas which were not accessible by tractors were cut every four weeks, the matter of a timetable for residents' information had been discussed earlier in the year and she would chase a response for Committee Members.

Councillor Jones directed the discussion to the matter of cost. According to the Cabinet agenda the pilot cause a £260,000 overspend within the Environment and Place budget yet another report stated a £313,000 overspend, he was concerned that the Council should be absolutely clear with regards to the budget. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place clarified that the £260,000 figure was that of the three month "Clean it, Cut it, Fill it" pilot and that Officers were very aware of the current position but he was confident that it should be absorbed in 2016/17 within either the Environment and Place budget, or that of the Council as a whole. The Chair asked whether it was likely there would be provision for the cost were the pilot to be extended to run for the full year. Members were assured that the review would provide full year cost details and that it would be a budget decision for Members.

Councillor Collins touched upon the question of income generation from Fixed Penalty Notices, but agreed to ask his question in relation to the next agenda item. Councillor Collins also asked whether there was any indication as to the cause of the fly-tipping problems in Thurrock. The Cabinet Member for Environment reminded the Committee that at the previous meeting Members had heard that there were many members of the traveller community who resided in Thurrock so that they could apply their trades in London, and worked within the Borough as well, and though the blame was not solely theirs she stressed the importance of employing responsible businesses able to provide the appropriate licences for waste disposal. There were many incidents of fly-tipping which involved building rubble which was not traceable. She continued that occasionally residents of Thurrock were also responsible, despite access to a Civic Amenities site, and it seemed that it was just a behavioural issue for some individuals.

The Committee was advised that there were also a large number of privately rented properties within Thurrock and their high turnover rate often led to the dumping of contents. The Council would be monitoring the situation closely as there seemed to be a small number of dump sites which were used frequently.

Councillor Piccolo congratulated the Cabinet Member for Environment for having successfully dealt with the problems within Thurrock, and he hoped things continued to improve. The improvement in Grays town centre was

greatly appreciated as it was often the “shop window” to people from outside of the Borough.

The Chair referred to the 11 additional barrow beats mentioned within the presentation and asked the Cabinet Member for Environment to agree to review hotspots and ensure the barrow beats tackled the worst areas. The Cabinet Member for Environment clarified that there were 20 beats in total and that the idea of the pilot was to monitor the situation and everybody wanted the Borough kept clean. She stressed that whilst certain areas, such as her own ward, were not so heavily littered it would be unacceptable to have certain areas with no barrow beats. The Chair agreed that there could be no areas with unacceptable levels of litter, but asked for assurance that proportionate effort would be targeted towards problem areas. The Committee was assured if an area needed to be cleaned it would be.

The Vice-Chair stated that since effort had been made to make Thurrock Cleaner the Borough’s reputation had improved. He questioned the will of the Borough to tackle the traveller aspect of fly-tipping head on, as historically the action taken had allowed traveller incursions to return and repeat their actions. He continued that many of their vehicles were liveried and looked very professional, which included company names yet they were allowed to leave without facing prosecution. Fly-tipping was happening right under the Council’s nose which was unacceptable and he believed that the money forced to be spent cleaning sites should be spent to prevent the incursions. He asked for any commitment to action which made it more difficult for travellers to set up a base, rather than dealing with the fly-tipping once they had left, once the damage to the reputation had been done and the residents had been upset by the situation.

Members heard that areas were being assessed though public access would need to be maintained. Dealings with the traveller community had also improved recently. Across Essex there was the Essex County Traveller Unit which worked to film incursions as they arrived and left so that registration plates could be recorded and any waste left behind was clearly visible.

The Corporate Director of Environment and Place outlined that with regards to Council owned land target hardening was a priority and it was hoped illegal encampments would continue to be deterred. The Committee was advised that, over the past 2-3 months, work with Essex Police had increased considerably and the key was to maintain the pressure moving forward. There was the issue of finding evidence of fly-tipping to ensure prosecution, but this would be covered more clearly within the next item and the Essex County Traveller Unit was looking at options to generate evidence.

The Chair asked whether the number of barrow beats would be included as part of the review to see whether it should be increased again to the original number of 25. Members were told that any areas with problems should be monitored and reported as the desire was to ensure the Borough was kept clean. The Chair asked if details of beats could be made available to Members. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place agreed they

would be circulated after the meeting and added that areas with high build up had the option to deep clean them so that day-to-day maintenance would be easier.

The Chair referred to the £12,000,000 spent on waste collection and asked whether there were plans to move to fortnightly collection. Members were assured that the Conservative Administration wished to retain weekly collection and that chances were not being considered as part of the current review of environment services. The Chair asked for a view to what areas were under consideration within the review. The Committee heard that there was a need to ensure a clean, contained collection service and if the correct items were placed within the correct bins it would save money, however residents were either disengaged or confused by the process. She continued that it was about education and communication though it was very hard to bring back staff to posts which had been deleted. There was no exact figure in mind but it was essential that the recycling rate increased. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place interjected that with regards to future savings nothing should be ruled out.

The Vice-Chair suggested a communications campaign, particularly directed towards school children, and the possibility of encouraging residents to check their immediate area on bin days and if there was any litter it could be put into their bins prior to collection. The Cabinet Member for Environment agreed that it could be possible to encourage pride in the area and many residents already did so, however certain residents might not have the time and others would say it was the job of street sweepers. She also expressed that sometimes parents displayed appalling behaviour and children educated their parents so it would be preferable to get back into schools.

Councillor Jones agreed that realistically it was an issue of education and should target children from primary school upwards to ensure they were engaged. He asked whether it would be possible for police to seize vehicles if it could be proven that they were used in fly-tipping. There had also been talk of bin collection via a "sweep system" and he asked whether it could be cost effective and better than the current system. The Committee heard that Union representatives had stated that coming from one side of the Borough to the other had been better and that the current system was not as effective as it had been and that this was being reviewed. With regards to vehicle seizure, the Cabinet Member for Environment admitted she would have to check to be sure though it did seem a good idea.

Councillor Piccolo recalled looking at another waste management scheme with only one bin and the waste would be separated on site. The Committee was advised that this was a very expensive system and recyclable material would be contaminated which would lead to lower quality and a lower price as opposed to curb-side sorting. Councillor Piccolo noted that at present the rate of recycling within Thurrock was at 40% and asked whether there was a level at which it would become more cost effective to use the alternative system. The issue faced was that increased contamination led to reduced

recycling and so more would be sent to landfill which was an expensive route, it was much better for waste to be separated prior to collection.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment again for her attendance and added that it was not common for Cabinet Members to attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings, to present a report and be faced with previously unseen questions for 45 minutes and it was greatly appreciated.

## **15. Street Cleansing Performance**

The Interim Head of Environment presented the report which gave an overview of the Street Cleansing Service's performance.

The Chair said it was disappointing that levels were similar to those of the previous year given the extra funding provided for 2016-17 however he noted that the inspection had taken place in August which was very early in the pilot and so he hoped there would be improvement at the next inspection. As the Ward Councillor for West Thurrock and South Stifford, his major concern was the distribution of littering and stressed the importance of tackling any hotspots that may have been identified.

The Interim Head of Environment agreed that within West Thurrock and South Stifford the levels of detritus were much higher which reflected the industrial nature of the area, and that the inspections were carried out so that officers could monitor and react to the information obtained and focus on any areas which presented hotspots or particular difficulties.

Councillor Collins asked whether there was any explanation as to why the levels of litter and detritus had been so low in 2014-15. The Interim Head of Environment admitted that she had not worked for Thurrock Council at that time, but it was likely that the Council had managed to get on top of things and then as the service was cut levels increased again. Councillor Collins asked if it was fair to say that, in reality, the "Clean it, Cut it, Fill it" campaign was tackling the previous year's litter as well as litter from 2016-17. The Interim Head of Environment agreed and outlined that areas were getting a more thorough deep clean than they had in recent years and as the inspection had been carried out in August it had been too early to tell but it was hoped that there would be an improvement in figures soon.

### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) The Committee noted the performance in relation to Street Cleansing and an update on the 'Clean, Cut it, Fill it' programme.**

## **16. Environmental Enforcement and Fly Tipping Update**

The Corporate Director of Environment and Place presented the report which was an update on the report presented at the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 July 2016. He insisted that the Council had followed the correct sequence strategy, as it would be

better only to penalise those dropping litter once the Borough had been cleaned and the anti-littering campaign had taken place. The report outlined options available to the Council in future and Officers were seeking the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to steer Cabinet in their final decision.

The Chair admitted that his initial view was that to “continue as is” would not be a viable option as there was a need to take a tough stance and see improvements within the Borough. He expressed his disappointment that the option to invest in in-house staff could not result in a revenue-neutral outcome whilst this could be achieved by dealing with an outside agency; however he saw no harm in a pilot scheme provided it was deployed sensibly. He stressed the importance of preventing non-proportionate fines, such as toddlers who dropped something from their pram, and safeguarding against the risk of non-payment. The Chair also stated that if, in future, it might be possible for these tasks to be undertaken by in-house staff then the option should remain on the table.

Councillor Jones echoed the view that it would be preferable to be cost-neutral. He stressed it was also crucial to be careful with any contractors and ensure there would be continued monitoring of how they worked, what work they carried out and what the cost would be. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place agreed that it was a very important point and the Council would set up the contract in such a way that there would be an incentive for the company to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) as they would retain a proportion of each fine as payment to remove risk to the Council, but at the same time it would outline specifications to prevent unnecessary fines.

The Chair expressed that he was eager to safeguard the Council’s ability to exit the contract and withdraw from anything which was not a positive for Thurrock. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place agreed with this sentiment, and requested Members allow officers to share updates between meetings so as to maintain momentum with the process.

Councillor Piccolo showed his support for the flexible option but echoed the same concerns around targeting accidental littering. He also asked whether the company could be used to enforce penalties for fly-posting which might be another form of income generation, and would target businesses rather than individual residents which might make the scheme more favourable to the public. Members heard that this could be possible, though it would depend upon the specifications outlined by the Council. This option also would be beneficial as it would enable in-house staff to focus on other areas of enforcement.

The Vice-Chair showed enthusiasm for the idea of allowing a company with experience that it appeared the Council currently lacked to offer back office staff a chance to clear the backlog of cases that had built up. He expressed caution at how far the enforcement company could be briefed to allow officers to use their imagination and discretion with cases, for example there were

issues with members of the public littering from their cars when stopped at junctions and if there were cameras installed this could be an additional possibility for income generation. Similarly if CCTV cameras were installed in areas with high levels of littering it would allow for guilty parties to be identified. The Vice-Chair also support might be offered to help officers identify individuals and ensure their safety, such as support from the Police. The Committee was advised that the enforcement company would focus on areas with high instances of littering, and while there were problems with residents littering from their cars at junctions there was a need to be as effective as possible. There would be a package of measures available but there was a need to ensure the chosen route was cost-effective and had the desired impact. With regards to CCTV it was important to remember that it was not ideal to have cameras everywhere and residents would not welcome the imposition. The Interim Head of Environment returned to the Vice-Chair's comments regarding safety and assured members that enforcement officers would wear body cameras and work in pairs to prevent abuse and ensure their security.

The Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Environment whether she would like to offer any input. The Cabinet Member for Environment stated it was a shame to have reached this situation and there should be no need to tell people how to use bins properly. She agreed that if the enforcement company were used to tackle littering, dog-fouling and similar offences then the in-house staff would have time to be more proactive and thorough in their work to ensure that cases that were sent to Court resulted in successful prosecution.

Councillor Collins asked whether, as this option offered cost-neutrality, there was any possibility of income generation and if there were any projections. The Committee was reminded that it was not an income generation plan and should not be seen as such, however if the Council could maintain a 60% payment rate and waive the early payment discount the scheme could be cost-neutral. Figures suggested that other boroughs were comfortably able to achieve rates of 65-70%.

Councillor Piccolo asked whether there was any suggestion that fly-tipping was seasonal, with a peak in summer when residents carried out home improvements, which might lead to a chance to release officers to focus on other tasks in low-periods. Members were advised that in general offences were fairly constant, and in the winter months the days grew darker earlier which made it easier for fly tippers. The Interim Head of Environment echoed earlier comments that this scheme would allow in-house officers more time to work on cases sent to Court to ensure prosecution.

Councillor Jones asked whether officers had found an enforcement company and if so, if they were recommended with any feedback from other Boroughs. Members were assured that Officers had explored feedback for a number of companies and where there had been difficulties reported it would be made very clear what Thurrock Council expected, as part of negotiations. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place expressed confidence that the



Council would be able to put an agreement in place which would achieve the desired outcomes.

The Chair said it would be helpful to be given full business cases for each option moving forward. Councillor Piccolo continued that Members had not been made aware of the full range of options a private company could enforce. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place noted strong endorsement for the flexible approach and asked if Members were comfortable for information to be shared with them as it arose, between meetings.

The Chair also reiterated the importance of freedom to exit any contract if requirements were not met. Councillor Collins asked if there were a notice period required for the Council to exit any contract if the service were to prove unsatisfactory, and whether there would be any financial penalties involved. Members were assured that any contact would be arranged in such a way that the Council would be free to exit if necessary. Councillor Collins requested clarity on the length of the notice period, and was advised it would depend upon the outcome of negotiations, but could be instant depending on the severity of the breach on the part of the enforcement company.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) The Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the options set out in the paper.**
- 2) The Committee noted that its comments will be used to inform the ongoing review of the environment service, which will include resourcing options.**
- 3) The Committee commented specifically on the early introduction of a pilot scheme for the use of a private company to enforce against littering as part of the ongoing anti-littering campaign.**

**17. Work Programme**

The Chair informed the Committee of amendments made to the Work Programme and asked whether Members were satisfied. Members agreed with the proposed amendments.

**RESOLVED:**

**Members noted the Work Programme including the amendments.**

**The meeting finished at 8.20 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**